

## Invisibly Visible, Visibly Invisible

Computers have fostered both a decline in and frenzy of visual knowledge. Opaque yet transparent, incomprehensible yet logical, they reveal that the less we know the more we show (or are shown). Two phenomena encapsulate this nicely: the proliferation of digital images (new media as “ visual culture ” ) and “ total information ” systems (new media as “ transparent ” ).

When digital cameras were introduced to the mass market in the 1990s, many scholars and legal experts predicted the end of photography and film. <sup>2</sup> The reasons they offered were both material and functional: the related losses of celluloid and of indexicality, the evidentiary link between artifact and event. If, as Roland Barthes argues, the photograph certifies that something has been — it is not a “ copy ” of a past reality, but an “ emanation of a past reality ” <sup>3</sup> — and if, as Mary Ann Doane contends, film as a historical artifact and the filmic moment as historical event are inextricably intertwined, <sup>4</sup> digital images by contrast break the temporal link between record and event. Because a memory card can be constantly rewritten, there is, theoretically, no fixed relationship between captured event and image. Thus, it is not just that digital images are easily manipulated, but also that the moments they refer to cannot be chemically verified. Digital images, in other words, challenge photorealism ’ s conflation of truth and reality: the notion that what is true is what is real and what is real is what is true.